

Tips for Saving Water Indoors and Outdoors

From the Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

Outdoor Water Use

Abide by local water use restrictions:

Local water suppliers know the limits of their system and will enact voluntary or mandatory restrictions accordingly. Always follow the advice or restrictions provided by your local water supplier.

Stop watering your lawn during drought conditions:

Most lawns can survive extended dry periods without watering - they will turn brown, but will revive once the rain returns.

If you water your lawn, water only as needed:

Frequent light watering can actually weaken your lawn by encouraging shallow roots that are less tolerant of dry periods. Water your lawn only as needed, generally no more than once or twice a week. A good test is to walk across the lawn. If the grass springs back up, it does not need to be watered.

Timing is critical for lawn watering:

The best time to water your lawn is early morning (4 to 6 AM). Avoid watering at mid-day to prevent high evaporation and sun-burned grass.

Use shut-off nozzles on hoses and automatic shut-off devices on irrigation systems:

Unattended hoses can use 10 gallons or more per minute. Use shut-off nozzles to save water. Also, if you have an in-ground irrigation system, use a rain shut-off device that prevents the system from operating during rainstorms.

Capture and reuse rainwater:

Use cisterns or rain barrels to capture rainwater from downspouts for use in your yard. A lid, mesh fabric or several drops of baby oil on the surface will prevent mosquitoes from breeding.

Keep your blades sharp and high:

Keep your mower blades sharp to prevent tearing of grass and raise your lawn mower's blade to 2 1/2". Longer grass provides shade for the roots and helps reduce water loss.

Use plants that need less water:

There are many varieties of low water use plants that can withstand dry summers and that actually thrive in drier soil.

Plan and design your garden for efficient outdoor watering:

Be aware of the various shade and moisture zones in your yard and plan your gardens and plantings accordingly.

Mulch to keep roots cool and moist:

Mulch can serve as a ground cover that reduces water evaporation from the soil while reducing the number of weeds that compete for soil moisture.

Kitchen

Prepare food efficiently:

Speed cleaning food by using a vegetable brush. Spray water in short bursts. Faucet aerators cut consumption.

Defrost sensibly:

Plan ahead to defrost foods overnight in the refrigerator. Don't use running water. Use the microwave or put wrapped food in a bowl of cold water.

Reduce dishwashing:

Use rubber spatula to scrape dishes clean to limit pre-rinse. Let really dirty pans or dishes soak to speed washing. Most newer dishwashers don't require pre-rinsing. Limit dishwasher use to full loads.

Reuse clean household water:

Collect all the water that is wasted while waiting for the hot water to reach your faucet or showerhead. Use this to water your houseplants or outdoor planters. Do the same with water that is used to boil eggs or steam vegetables.

Garbage disposal alternatives:

Avoid using your garbage disposal. Compost leftovers fruits and vegetables.

Bathroom

Fix leaking faucets and toilets:

Research has shown that an average of 8% (or more) of all home water use is wasted through leaks. Test for a leaking toilet by lifting the lid off the toilet tank and putting a few drops of food coloring into the bowl. Wait a few minutes, then look in the bowl. If the food coloring has made its way there, you have a leak.

Install a low-flow toilet:

Low-flow toilets need only 1.6 gallons per flush, saving thousands of gallons per year. Unlike earlier models, low flow toilets available today receive high marks from consumers for overall performance.

Avoid using the toilet as a wastebasket:

Every flush you eliminate can save between two and seven gallons of water.

Brush teeth efficiently:

Don't let the water run while you brush your teeth or shave. Turn the faucet on briefly to rinse. An electric razor saves water.

Conserve water in the tub:

Take showers instead of a bath and save 30 gallons. Filling the bathtub uses about 50 gallons of water. Try filling it just half way.

Shorten your shower by one minute:

Cut back on your shower time and you will rack up big savings in water and energy. If you really want to try and save water, limit your shower time to five minutes or less. Also, install a water-saving showerhead that uses two-and-a-half gallons per minute.

Laundry

Wash only full loads of laundry:

You'll not only save water, but energy as well.

Consider purchasing a new water- and energy-efficient clothes washer:

Look for the Energy Star labeled products and save more water in one year than a person drinks in a lifetime. These units create less wear and tear on clothes, clean better, and use less detergent. Some electric utilities offer rebates for qualified models.